



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: June 24, 2006
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1065: 19-21 Field Street

An application to demolish the house at 19-21 Field Street was received on June 7. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for June 29.

Site

The two-family house is located on the north side of Field Street, opposite Chilton Street (see attached Sanborn map). The structure is a 2½-story, frame dwelling on a cast-stone foundation. A curb cut and driveway are located on the west side of the house.

The structure is sited on a 5,348 square-foot lot (Map 262/Parcel 17) in a Residence B zone. The residential zone allows one and two-family construction. The zone permits an FAR of 0.5 and has a height limit of 35 feet. The house has ample setbacks and abuts a vacant lot, which serves as the rear yard of 270 Garden Street that has never been developed.

The neighboring properties are similar in style and massing to 19-21 Field Street. The abutting house to the east, #15-17 Field Street, is almost identical in massing and roof configuration, though it does not have projecting porches and has been more recently renovated than 19-21 Field Street.

Architectural Description

The house at 19-21 Field Street is a 2½-story, Bungalow-style house built in 1927 as a two-family residence. The house has a shallow-pitched gable roof, asbestos shingle siding, cast-stone foundation, and 1-over-1 (replacement) double-hung sash windows. A two-story front porch is located on the right half of the façade. Though not the textbook Bungalow, this type of two-story, two-family house is typical of the style in Cambridge and this is a characteristic example in the neighborhood. The Bungalow-style features present in this example include the shallow-pitched roof, projecting eaves, exposed rafter tails, battered porch columns, and an Arts and Craft window in the stairwell. Many of the houses on this block of Field Street were built between 1927-1928 and exhibit similar massing and details, though they were

not all designed by the same architect or constructed by the same builder. This house was developed and built by Frank Burwell.

The house is an example of the two-family suburban house type that became the dominant house form in Northwest Cambridge around the turn of the twentieth century. Over a thousand two-family houses were built for middle and working class families between 1885-1935. (*Northwest Cambridge*, p. 74). Standardized plans and stock construction materials made it possible for many houses to be constructed at the same time by a single developer. The rising costs of materials and labor in the years following World War I resulted in smaller houses with less ornamentation. Two-family house construction stopped during the Great Depression, but the form left a lasting mark on the Northwest Cambridge neighborhood. (*Northwest Cambridge*, p. 75).

19-21 Field Street, ca. 2006. Photograph submitted with application.

Significant alterations have been made to the house. Most of the original 6-over-1 window sash have been replaced with 1-over-1 vinyl clad units. The second floor of the porch is closer to the original condition than the more-modified first floor. The original battered columns remain on the second floor but were replaced with square posts on the first floor. The porch railings are closed, which is likely the original design, but they are now covered with asbestos shingles, as is the rest of the house. The asbestos shingles were installed over a layer of asphalt shingles (1948) that cover the original siding material, which was probably wood shingles. A large shed dormer was constructed in 1965. The original roofing material was asphalt shingles, which have been replaced a couple of times. A small fire damaged a portion of the roof in 1973. A ramp for wheelchair access to the house was built in front of the porch in 1988 to accommodate the needs of the owners.

The current condition of the structure is fair. The envelope of the house has been protected from exposure to the weather and the maintenance needs reduced with the introduction of artificial siding and windows. The roof and foundation appear in

good condition. There is no obvious exterior evidence suggesting that the house is unsound.

The current proposal for the lot is to demolish the house and construct a new two-unit condominium with environmentally-conscious energy systems. The footprint of the new building would be very much the same as the existing with the exception of the porches. Side and rear elevations of the proposed new building have been requested and will be presented at the hearing.

History

Though abutting neighborhoods developed in the mid nineteenth century, the area on either side of Concord Avenue, between Vassal Lane on the south and Garden Street on the north, did not develop until after World War I. The property at 19-21 Field Street was part of a larger parcel of land owned by the Bay State Brick Company (later the New England Brick Company). In the late nineteenth century, Bay State Brick Company purchased many of the smaller independent clay pits and brick manufacturing operations in Northwest Cambridge.

A parcel of Bay State Brick Company land was purchased by the City and subdivided for residential development in 1896 in an effort by the Board of Health to reduce the risk and spread of malaria by filling in the low wet area of the clay pits. Thirteen streets were laid out as shown in a subdivision plan of the Clay Lands District by W. A. Mason & Son dated August 5, 1896 (see plan attached). House construction in this new neighborhood was slow until after World War I, when the eastern portion of the Clay Land District took off. The western portion was slower to develop but construction picked up after World War II.

Danehy Park is located nearby. The park was formerly a large clay pit of the Bay State Brick Company, providing clay for brick production from 1847 to 1952. Before clay mining ceased at the site, the City had already begun to use parts of the pit as a municipal landfill. Fill from the Red Line subway extension was used beginning in 1978 to cap the site. Up to 40 feet of clean fill completed the cap of the 50 acre site, which was landscaped and opened as a city park in 1992.

The first residents of 19-21 Field Street were Anthony and Corinne Rocha (#19) and John and Irene Turner. Anthony was a helper and John was a clerk, according to the city directories. Subsequent residents of the house included Frank Simmons, a chef, Ida Roosa, widow, Russell Armstrong and Causwald Newton, both machinists. The longest term residents, and most-recent, were Ulysses H. Gore and his wife Ruth D. Gore. They consolidated the two sides of the house sometime in the 1970s.

Ulysses Gore was born in 1918 and grew up in Cambridgeport. He served in the Army during World War II and worked for the Air Force in the 1960s. He was first a clerk and later a maintenance analyst at Hanscom Field in Bedford. As a civilian, he worked as a financial analyst. He was the first president of the Cambridge Veterans Organization and remained actively involved with local veterans' observances. He was a Prince Hall Mason and had a strong interest in Cambridge African American history. He died January 7, 2006 and Ruth, his wife of 51 years, died not long after.

Significance and Recommendation

The structure at 19-21 Field Street is significant for its associations with the broad social history of the City as an example of suburban residential construction following the First World War. The house is also significant for its architecture, as a representative example of the Bungalow style in Cambridge and as an example of the two-family house type that was prevalent in the Northwest Cambridge neighborhood between 1885-1935. The house is significant for its associations with Ulysses H. Gore, a well-respected and active member of the community. It is the staff recommendation that the structure be found significant for these reasons.

It is the staff recommendation that the Commission hear testimony from the owners and neighbors and review the plans for the replacement structure before making a further determination.

